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ATTITUDES OF MODERN STUDENTS TOWARDS FAMILY FORMATION  
AND HAVING CHILDREN: RESEARCH RESULTS

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**Abstract.** *The purpose of our study was to assess the modern students' assessment of the prospects of creating a family and having children. The empirical basis of the study was the results of a questionnaire survey of 84 students aged 17 to 24 years old. Theoretical analysis allowed us to state that in modern conditions the formation of family values has been transformed under the influence of popularisation of various non-standard models of family relationships in the media and Internet resources; increasing trends of 'child-free', voluntary abandonment of the family; shifting the emphasis from child-centred to conjugal family and to informal relationships, as well as preference for building a career and achieving high social status. The conducted questionnaire survey of students actualises the problem of young people's attitude to marriage, family formation and, of course, the birth of children in the family. Today's students express their intention to create a family in the future, plan to have children, but at the same time they believe that children can interfere with their career. They fear that they will not be able to combine their responsibilities at home and at work. Many also note that low income, difficult life conditions do not favour the birth of children. The results of the empirical study help to expand the theoretical basis about the peculiarities of reproductive behaviour of student youth.*

**Key words:** family, marriage, family values, parenthood, childbirth, student youth.

**Introduction**

One of the most serious problems we see in society today is the crisis of the family as a basic social institution. Over time, the changes taking place in the formation of the family have affected its functions and the role behaviour of family members, as well as society's perception of the family in general. Changes in the family system and the role functions of the family lead to the fact that in modern society the problem of forming adequate perceptions of the family by young people is acute. Nevertheless, according to numerous studies, the family remains one of the most important aspects in the lives of young people. Youth, its value orientations, its trends and prospects of development, as well as the attitude of young people to family and marriage and the formation of family values are of great importance for the stable development of society.

In modern publications on the topic of family values, one can find a large number of opinions. For example, the work of D.V. Medkova provides a rather broad characteristic of family values, under which the author understands 'cultivated in society ideas about the family, about relations in the family, formed on the basis of the basic values' [1] I.P. Lotova presents her own view on the classification of family values: 'values related to marriage, values related to parenthood, and values related to kinship' [2]. Foreign researchers also adhere to the point of view about the importance of family values development in the process of students' education in higher education, taking into account the relationship between education and universal values, pointing out that values occupy a central position in the cognitive system of the student's personality, as they include knowledge, affective and behavioural components that determine their attitudes and motivations [3].

Sooner or later everyone necessarily thinks about creating a family. At the same time, people often define why they need a family in different ways. For someone family – is a support in difficult life circumstances, someone wants to love and be loved, and for someone family – is some benefit, comfort and convenience. Unfortunately, there is an increasing number of young people who are aware of the phenomenon of ‘childfree’, are neutral about it and are not ready to give birth and raise children independently [4]. In the value hierarchy of young people the priorities are career, professional fulfilment and financial well-being. The existing contradictions indicate the need to organise targeted training of young people to perform the social role of a family man and parent. To become a parent, it is necessary to fulfil at least two conditions: to have a family and to have children [5].

According to L.O. Volodina, in Russia there is a transformation of family values, ‘individualistically oriented value systems with such a priority as freedom of choice of marriage partner and forms of joint life are widely spread’ [6]. [6]. No less destructive influence on the formation of family and marriage values among young people is caused by the popularisation of various non-standard models of relationships in the media and Internet resources (free relationships, same-sex marriages, families with hedonistic values, not planning to have children, etc.). T.A. Rassadina believes that the change in the social institution of the family should be understood as the displacement or replacement of its socialising function by other social institutions, such as the media, mass culture, etc. [7]. [7].

We investigate whether and how students' attitudes towards marriage and divorce have changed from 2002 to 2018. Students in 2018 have more positive attitudes towards divorce and more negative attitudes towards marriage than students in 2002. We also found differences in attitudes toward divorce by gender and family type. [8]

Unfortunately, researchers have noted an increase in neoliberal family trends such as ‘child-free’, same-sex marriage, voluntary family abandonment; the purpose of marriage is shifting from child-centred to conjugal family and to informal relationships [9]. The main characteristics of this model of reproductive behaviour are preference for building a career, professional self-realisation and high social status, in other words, there is a transformation of family values [10].

Family problems are especially acute in youth and young adulthood, so it seems necessary to study the attitude of students to family life. In modern conditions it is necessary to search for new approaches to solving the problem of creating a family. One of them is the value approach. Its essence is that family values are defined as dominant.

Studying at a university – is an important period in the life of young people. At this time, not only professional training and professional formation take place, but also personal self-determination is completed. According to statistics, about 30 per cent of students start their own families during their higher education. On this basis, the purposeful study of the process of students' preparation for future family life is of great importance. According to M.G. Korolev, the emphasis should be placed on the formation of social qualities, including the qualities of parenthood [11]. The problems of student families are the subject of many studies that affect both the value bases of the family and the reproductive behaviour of young spouses, and substantiate promising directions of targeted demographic and family policy [12; 13; 14; 15]. Modern youth is extremely heterogeneous, which is expressed both in the transmission of approved values and in behaviour, including reproductive behaviour. The desire to get an education, find a promising job, have a good income influence the decision to create a family and its functioning [16].

How do young people feel about marriage? Are they ready to create a family, and at what age do they think it is desirable to create a family? What, according to young people, is the main meaning of family life? In order to understand how modern student youth relate to marriage, we conducted this study.

### **Materials and methods of research**

In order to study the attitude of today's students to creating a family and having children, we conducted a questionnaire survey among students studying at the full-time department of the Faculty of Psychology of the L.N. Tolstoy TSPU.

In accordance with the goal set, the following tasks were determined:

- to analyse scientific publications in order to identify the main groups of family values;
- to analyse the content of publications and studies related to the development of family values;
- to empirically study the attitude of student youth to the creation of a family and having children.

Based on the analysis of available studies, as well as the systematisation of scientific and methodological materials on family issues and family values, we developed a questionnaire, which includes three sections: introductory, main and final.

The study involved 84 students studying at the full-time department of the Faculty of Psychology of L.N. Tolstoy Pedagogical University. Of the total number of respondents, 84 per cent were girls and only 6 per cent were boys. The age range of respondents was from 17 to 24 years old, i.e. students from I to IV courses.

Analysing the age groups of respondents, it should be noted that the most active participants of the questionnaire were students aged 20 years (33.3%). The age groups of 19 years old (31%) and 18 years old (17.9%) are represented in descending order.

#### Results and Discussion

Of the total sample, 96.4% of respondents are single/unmarried, with 48.8% answering that they have a young man/girlfriend. When asked, 'Do you plan to get legally married in the future?' - 83.3 per cent of respondents answered in the affirmative. Of the total number of respondents, 12.7% categorically answered 'No'. This means that half of the respondents do not have premarital relations. All this suggests that the process of socialisation of students in general does not go beyond the accepted acceptable norms.

The next question: 'At what age are you going to start a family (or have you already married)?' implied five answer options: '20 - 25 years old', '26 - 30 years old', '31 - 35 years old', '36 - 40 years old' and 'I am not going to'.

Thus, 90.4% of surveyed students consider the most acceptable age for marriage to be the period from 20 to 30 years. According to O.V. Kovalchuk et al., the student age (which is the years from 18 to 24 years) for marriage is the most optimal, because "spouses in a student family are in the same socio-cultural field, share the same traditions, participate in the same social rituals and events, which also allows them to painlessly organise a single value, normative and orderly field of everyday life, which, in turn, can stimulate the desire to have children [17]. Recent studies by Russian scientists have shown that marriage after the age of 20 prevents divorce, but this applies only up to the age of 25. After the age of 25, it is almost impossible to predict the probability of divorce. This contradicts the notion that the later one marries, the better. People who marry later may indeed be more mature, but also each spouse already has their own life experiences. This is what causes many of the problems in late marriages. Instead of developing together while their twentysomething selves are still in the formative stages, partners who start living together later in life may already have established habits and formed qualities.

Foreign researchers also adhere to the position that marriages concluded between 20 and 30 years of age are the most successful. Having reached this age, young people are already quite knowledgeable and experienced in matters of interpersonal relations, they are able to cope with all kinds of life problems, including emotional, financial, etc.

Using the example of Western countries, scientists have shown that the second demographic transition is closely connected with modernity and post-industrialism, which emphasize individual rights and freedoms of citizens, including the right of women to decide on marriage and childbearing regardless of traditions [18]

It should be noted that reproductive behaviour as well as reproductive attitudes are formed under the influence of the surrounding social environment, in which beliefs and attitudes towards family and children are formed. To the question of the survey: 'Do you think that children are happiness?' - 27.4% of students answered affirmatively 'No'. Speaking about the reproductive attitudes of the respondents, attention should be paid to the desired or planned number of children. Students participating in our study represent respondents of active reproductive age (youth group 17-24 years old). At the same time, answering the question about the desired number of children in the future family, 17.9% of respondents chose the answer: 'None'. The largest percentage of respondents (41.7 per cent) plan to have two children, 28.6 per cent – one child, 10.7 per cent – three children and 1.2 per cent – think of having more than three children in their family.

The results of the conducted questionnaire indicate that the attitudes of the absolute majority (82.1%) of the students we surveyed demonstrate the attitude of young people to the value of family and childbirth and are oriented towards the model of a medium-sized family. We can state that in the reproductive attitudes of student youth there are practically formed stable ideas about the desired family model, where the maximum number of children does not exceed two. The data we have obtained correlate with the results of a survey on the reproductive attitudes of Russians conducted by VCIOM in February 2025: "Taking into account the real life circumstances, Russians, as five years ago, intend to stop at one or two children. The intention to give birth to three or four children is growing, but extremely slowly" [19].

When analysing students' reproductive attitudes to the number of children in their future families, it is worth paying attention to the reasons for young people's refusal to have children. Thus, students' answers to the question: 'Why do you think young people decide not to have children?', involving multiple choice, were distributed as follows:

65.5% of students consider 'unstable situation in the world' as a significant reason for not having children. Another 58.3% of respondents named 'difficult life' and 'lack of money' as a reason, referring to low wages and lack of proper effective measures to support families with children. According to N.A. Kasimovskaya and other researchers, young people's values and attitudes towards parenthood and childbirth are the main factors determining the model of reproductive behaviour. Many authors note that the number of students in higher education institutions who are aware of the phenomenon of 'childfree' has increased 1.5-2 times, which certainly has an impact on the 'unreadiness' and unwillingness to give birth and raise children. In the hierarchy of values of young people the main attention is paid to career, professional fulfilment and financial well-being [20].

Thus, the consciousness of young people is 'stuck' between traditional ideas about family, parenthood and understanding the difficulties of life situations related to the creation of a family and the birth of children. First of all, students consider financial and housing problems as the main obstacles to family creation.

The stable belief of a significant part of the respondents that having a child not only leads to a decrease in the financial situation of the family, but also negatively affects the possibilities of their professional self-realisation and career development has a rather tangible impact on reproductive attitudes. Thus, 52.4 per cent of the respondents named 'unwillingness to sacrifice career' as the reason, and 51.2 per cent - 'inability to effectively combine work and family'. Traditionally, this reason is more characteristic of girls/women. They most often face the dilemma of whether to devote themselves to their career or to family and motherhood. More and more women are aiming at career development, including the development of professional competences.

The share of those who tend to adhere to the view that the refusal to have children is a consequence of the reasons 'unwillingness to take responsibility for another person', 'unwillingness to spend money on children', 'want freedom' and 'just don't want to' is quite high - from 16.7% to 52.4% of respondents. These results correlate with the data given in the report by K. Abramov, Director General of the VCIOM Foundation, at the Eastern Economic Forum in 2024, that "the desire to live for themselves was named by 68% of young Russians as the main reason why they do

not plan to have children. Another 58% noted their psychological unreadiness for parenthood" [21] [21]. Moreover, today's young people simply do not know how to take responsibility for everything that happens to them. Instead of discovering the reasons in themselves and their actions, they tend to look for them outside. A sociological survey conducted by N.D. Skosyreva et al. showed that family values, interesting work and material well-being constitute the axiological core of the worldview of modern youth [22].

Young people who refuse to procreate are becoming an integral part of our modern society. It seems that young people who have flown out of the parental nest are trying their best to enjoy this life and get pleasure. The hedonistic orientation of today's youth is one of the most significant factors threatening the tradition of family building in modern society. The opposition between hedonism and family values seems to stem from the persistent belief that the family implies certain deprivations and leaves few opportunities to fulfil the needs relevant to the hedonist. Young people prefer to spend the money they earn on their own entertainment and jewellery, which have no real value and bring only short-term pleasure.

The choice by students (9.5% of respondents) of such a reason for not having children as 'do not seek to grow up and live with parents for a long time' is alarming. Over the last 15 years, the age of 'separation from parents' has noticeably increased. Today, according to statistics, almost 90 per cent of young people consider the optimal age for starting an independent life to be between 23 and 25. Thus, today we have to observe the co-dependence of adult children and their parents. It should be noted that some young families are financially dependent on their parents, as they continue to live with them or use their parents' investments, which adds to the difficulty of establishing family relations. Adult children have no way to become independent, find themselves and fulfil themselves in society.

### **Conclusion**

Students are a specific youth group. The factor of higher education and postponement of the beginning of independent labour activity leads to increased freedom of choice and complication of the process of value self-determination. At the same time, value attitudes of young people are still highly dependent on external factors, social changes.

The conducted questionnaire survey actualises the problem of young people's attitude to marriage, family formation and, of course, the birth of children in the family. One should not put an equal sign between the concepts of 'family' and 'marriage'. They are close, but not identical concepts. It should be understood that family unites spouses (husband and wife), children and relatives, while marriage unites only spouses. The essence of the family is expressed in the structure, functions and role behaviour of its members. The main functions of the family are: reproductive, educational, training and communicative.

More and more researchers say that the family system is experiencing a deep crisis. Everyone knows that family problems, tense environment can affect the physical and psychological state of a person.

Today's students express their intention to get married in the future, plan to have children, but at the same time believe that children may interfere with their career; they fear that they will not be able to combine family and work responsibilities. Many also note that low incomes, difficult life situations and the spread of negative 'childfree' thinking among young people are not favourable to having children.

Based on the studies of Russian psychologists, who present the student age as a sensory period for the development of the main sociogenic potentials of a young person: the development of one's own worldview and system of values, awareness of one's own identity and uniqueness, personal and professional self-determination, it is necessary to consider the period of studenthood as a transitional stage, during which the refraction in consciousness and the development of subjective attitude of an individual to what is presented from the outside as values takes place.

We can conclude that, although young people recognise the value of family as significant, it is important to note that it is not always a meaningful and lifelong reference point. This

contradiction indicates the need to organise purposeful training of student youth to perform the social role of a family man and parent.

The obtained results of the empirical study contribute to the expansion of the theoretical base on the peculiarities of reproductive behaviour of student youth; they can be successfully applied in individual and family psychotherapy and psychological counselling, in activities aimed at preventing the decline in fertility.

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